

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 4, 2015

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

Following your recent statement on “the Safety and Security of the Homeland, and How Congress Can Help” on November 23, 2015, we write to express our solidarity in the cause to keep our homeland safe, and request additional information necessary to assist us achieve this shared goal.

We are a generous nation and have always welcomed those from abroad escaping war and oppression. We share your sentiment that “we must not forget that the overwhelming majority of Syrian refugees are women, children and families who are fleeing the very same terrorism and violence we are concerned about.”

However, it would be reckless for the administration, as well as Congress, to not take the threats we face seriously. We must seek to implement a clear and reliable process to ensure any refugee admitted to the United States has been extensively vetted.

We appreciated the issues laid out in your statement, and in an effort to further the dialogue on how best to provide for the security of Americans, we respectfully request information on the following:

1. Recent Congressional hearings have shed light on “gaps” in the federal government’s ability to effectively screen Syrian refugees entering the country. Generally, has the Department of Homeland Security (the Department) developed a plan on how best to handle the influx of an additional 15,000 refugees for FY 2016 as announced by the administration? When can Congress expect to see one, and will you share with Congress the information used to develop such a plan?
2. You stated “The process for vetting refugee applicants is extraordinarily thorough and strong.” Can you elaborate on the Department’s procedures, if any, for reviewing our security screening of refugees? What data or other information on attempted acts of terrorism, or other crimes executed by refugees in the U.S. are available since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980?
3. You also stated “We continually seek to improve our screening, and continue to evaluate whether more precautions are appropriate in light of new circumstances.” What specifically are you evaluating in the refugee admissions process? Are you collaborating with the Department of State, the Department of Health and Human Services, the intelligence community, or any other domestic agencies? What thresholds does the Department review to define “appropriate”? What steps have been taken or are being taken to “improve” our screening?

4. You stated "...I directed a series of security enhancements to our Visa Waiver Program which took effect at the beginning of this year." What specific "enhancements" are you referring to? What, specifically, were the goals of these "enhancements," how did the Department determine the formulation of these "enhancements" would achieve these goals, and did you consult with Congress when developing these "enhancements"?
5. Improvements to our own security and vetting process can only go so far when there is a lack of credible information. What steps is the Department taking to account for this vacuum? Is the Department collaborating with governments and entities outside the U.S., including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees?
6. Further, you stated "Those enhancements have proven effective. In August, I announced even more security enhancements to the program." What have they been proven effective accomplishing? What metrics did the Department use to determine these "enhancements" were effective? What further "enhancements" are you referring to, how were these "enhancements" formulated, and what prompted the Department to develop these "enhancements"?
7. As you know, Congress continues to seek to balance spending taxpayer dollars efficiently and effectively while ensuring our national security needs are met. With that in mind, is the Department anticipating additional budgetary requests from Congress due to the administration's announcement of 15,000 additional refugees for FY16? If not, what is the Department's plan to cover the costs of screening and vetting an additional 15,000 refugees? Is it your belief the priority in funding allocations should be to "fully fund the President's budget request for aviation security" and expedite efforts to "build preclearance capability at foreign airports" as detailed in your statement?
8. In 2009, a flaw in the screening of Iraqi refugees allowed two al Qaeda-linked terrorists to enter the United States and settle in Bowling Green, Kentucky. In the aftermath of this case the Obama administration halted the refugee program for Iraqis for six months. What flaws were discovered in the process that ultimately allowed these terrorists into the U.S.? What steps, if any, did the administration take to address these flaws? What impact did the six-month moratorium on refugees have to the overall admissions process for refugees?
9. Overall, what input, if any, are you seeking from state or local governments? What role do states currently play, and will states be informed of any changes to the refugee admissions process?

Americans are a compassionate people, but we must not underestimate the resolve of those who seek to do us harm and undermine freedom everywhere. We must also not forget the oath we have taken to "defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

Again, we stand ready to work with you to further our shared goal of a safer homeland. Thank you for your attention to our request. We look forward to receiving your response.

David Young
Member of Congress

Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress

Lamar Smith
Member of Congress

Austin Scott
Member of Congress

Sincerely,

Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress

Steven Palazzo
Member of Congress

Bruce Poliquin
Member of Congress

Andy Barr
Member of Congress